

Mary Sheehan 1971–1974

Just Ramblins

The most important thing learned at the union, most important aspect: friendship. Knowing people were like-minded, not having to always explain yourself. People knowing about how you would respond to a situation. Trust.

Staying friends with people over many years.

Of moving ideas from theory to actions—involving in the practical.

Freedom.

Being right without being self-righteous.

What to say, love, hate, some betrayal of ideals, reality.

This is my name, this is my story, la le la le la.

What the union meant to me, what it meant to the thousands of people who put faith in it.

The boycott, the sandwich brigade people having courage to put themselves in the way of danger, being laughed at, abused, still believing that the cause was greater than their own pain or discomfort.

“*Si se Puede*,” he said, even though the odds were against accomplishing the task at hand. Drive to a far distant place, set up an office, have a picket line in three locations, and pull people out of the fields and onto the picket line, and do it all using a car held together with wire and twine and with only a handful of leaflets. So we went and did it, even after protesting that we couldn’t. And then he said, “See, you could do it, you did it, *si se puede*!”.

Stories: We all have some, we are the central character. Interesting to see if other people remember the events the way I do.

Ramblin’ on ... the strikes. The early-in-the-morning duty getting the cars the gas coupons so they can roll, finding and then evading the Teamsters. Did we offer enough for them to overcome the years of stooping, of following, what they would get versus what they knew they had, was it enough to take a chance?

Not just watching it but being a part of it, maybe nameless and faceless, doesn’t matter. I don’t need my name in lights, I need to know that what I and we did mattered and made a difference, and the thanks for that comes from within, self-worth and dignity.

A word about power. Maybe I learned it in the union or maybe in the union is where it became so obvious and important, the power of standing together, the power of a fist raised not in anger but to give form to the people united. I guess it is a sentiment not much in practice these days, a natural part of what came out of the 1960s. When people came to the realization of their own power, but they had to exercise it. Power is taken, never given.

Anecdotes, stories. Getting up at 3 in the morning to beat Cesar to the office so when I spoke with him later in the day, he couldn't pull the "I'm tired" routine on me, because I had been at the office before him.

Driving across Arizona with the strike files in the back of the car when we learned that the attorney general's office was going to try to seize our records. Arriving in La Paz, picket line at 4 a.m. in Arvin, driving to Parlier and paying strike benefits in the park under a bare lamp bulb until midnight. Same strike, when the judge wouldn't let the hundreds arrested on the picket line out of jail on OR, and visiting them to pay strike benefits in Fresno jail.

Jim Drake said in Arizona in November 1972, just after winning the No on 22 campaign in California, to those of us who came to try to recall Jack Williams, that "We belong to the wind now." Going where the next picket line was organized, being on the boycott in front of Safeway in all weather. We belonged to the wind. Do we still?